

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 MCE-00 ACDA-12 OMB-01
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R 211318Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8187
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 18245

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MMOL, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN ACQUISITION OF DEEP PENETRATION STRIKE AIRCRAFT
(DPSA)

REF: (A) STATE 295985 (B) ISLAMABAD 12276

1. SUMMARY: THE NEXT FORMAL STEP IN INDIA'S ACQUISITION
OF A DPSA, THE CALLING FOR BIDS FROM THE THREE MAJOR
CONTENDERS(BRITISH, FRENCH, AND SWEDISH), HAS BEEN
DELAYED, AND OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUES DO NOT KNOW IF
THIS IS MORE THAN BUREAUCRATIC. P.R. CHARI, THE DIRECTOR
OF THE GOI FUNDED INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE STUDIES AND
ANALYSES, A CRITIC OF INDIA'S ACQUIRING THE DPSA,

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BELIEVES THAT WITHIN THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT THE
CASE FOR THE DPSA HAS DEVELOPED A MOMENTUM OF ITS OWN.
WE AGREE WITH CHARI AND BELIEVE THAT INDIA WILL ACQUIRE
THE DPSA. GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THE PROJCT, WE DO NOT
VENTURE A PREDICTION AS TO WHEN THAT MIGHT BE. CHARI
STATED THAT PAKISTAN'S REACTION TO AN INDIAN DPSA HAS
NOT BEEN GIVEN SERIOUS CONSIDERATION BY DEFENSE MINISTRY

OFFICIALS. WE SEE INDIA AND PAKISTAN ON THE VERGE OF AN EXPENSIVE AND POINTLESS ESCALATION OF THE LEVEL OF THEIR ARMS. END SUMMARY.

2. BRITISH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER W.L. ALLINSON TOLD AN EMBOFF LATE LAST WEEK THAT THE GOI WAS TO HAVE CALLED FOR FORMAL BIDS FROM THE THREE CONTENDERS FOR THE SALE OF A DPSA (BRITAIN - JAGUAR, FRANCE - MIRAGE F1, AND SWEDEN - VIGGEN) AT ABOUT THE TIME THE CYCLONE STRUCK ANDHRA PRADESH. THAT WAS ON NOVEMBER 19, AND SINCE THEN NOTHING FURTHER HAS BEEN HEARD FROM THE INDIANS ON THE SUBJECT: ASKED TO WHAT HE ATTRIBUTED THE DELAY, ALLINSON, WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION'S EFFORTS TO SELL THE JAGUAR, SAID THAT THEY WERE UNCERTAIN. PERHAPS IT WAS BUREAUCRATIC, BUT HE ALSO SAID THAT ONE EXPLANATION FOR THE DELAY, ADMITTEDLY CONJECTURAL, WAS THAT HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH WAS INTERFERING IN THE PROJECT TO VEX DEFENSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM, A POLITICAL RIVAL. (WE FIND THIS FAR-FETCHED.) ALLINSON ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE CALL FOR BIDS WAS A FORMALITY, AS THE GOI AT THIS POINT HAD ALL THE INFORMATION IT REQUIRED TO MAKE A CHOICE AMONG THE THREE PLANES. HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE RUSSIAN MIG 25 WAS NOT BEING CONSIDERED BY THE GOI, AS IT DID NOT HAVE THE PERFORMANCE CAPABILITIES WHICH LED THE GOI TO CONSIDER THE OTHER THREE PLANES.

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3. IN BRIEFING US ON THE STATUS OF THE DPSA SALE, ALLINSON TOOK THE OCCASION TO EXPRESS HIS CONCERN THAT THE USG MIGHT INTERFERE IN THE TRANSACTION. HE WARNED THAT THE SAME THING WOULD HAPPEN TODAY AS OCCURRED IN THE 1960'S, I.E. A FAILURE OF HMG OR THE USG TO BE RESPONSIVE TO INDIAN MILITARY REQUIREMENTS (THEN IT WAS AIRCRAFT AND SUBMARINES) WOULD RESULT IN THE USSR FILLING THE VOID. EMBOFF DID NOT RECALL TO ALLINSON HIS EARLIER STATEMENT THAT THE SOVIETS DID NOT HAVE A PLANE THE INDIANS WOULD BE INTERESTED IN. HOWEVER, ALLINSON LATER SAID THAT IN ANY CASE THE FRENCH WOULD HAVE NO RESERVATIONS ABOUT SELLING ARMS.

4. P.R. CHARI, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE STUDIES AND ANALYSES, A "THINK-TANK" FUNDED LARGELY BY THE GOI BUT WHICH, ACCORDING TO CHARI, DOES NOT USE CLASSIFIED DATA IN ITS WORK, TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE DECISION TO ACQUIRE THE DPSA HAD ACQUIRED ITS OWN MOMENTUM. CHARI HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES RECENTLY CALLING INTO QUESTION THE WISDOM OF INDIA'S HAVING A DPSA. THE THRUST OF HIS ARGUMENT IS THAT THERE ARE MORE COST EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVES, E.G., IMPROVED AIR DEFENSE, WHICH HAVE TO

BE EXPLORED. HE DOUBTS, HOWEVER, THAT AT THIS POINT SUCH ARGUMENTATION WILL DISSUADE THE GOVERNMENT, AS THERE ARE EXTRA-SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS SUCH AS NATIONAL PRESTIGE AND THE NEED TO SATISFY THE MILITARY WHICH WILL MOST PROBABLY RESULT IN THE PURCHASE OF A DPSA.

5. ASKED TO COMMENT ON THE REGIONAL PICTURE, CHARI, WHO IS GENERALLY WELL INFORMED ABOUT SECURITY QUESTIONS, SAID THAT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM OF PAKISTAN'S REACTING TO INDIA'S ACQUISITION OF A DPSA WAS NOT BEING SERIOUSLY (I.E. IMPARTIALLY) CONSIDERED BY MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OFFICIALS. ACCORDING TO CHARI, THEY ARGUED THAT THE DPSA WAS NEEDED AS A DETERRENT AGAINST PAKISTAN'S MIRAGE SQUADRONS. A THREAT FROM CHINA, HE SAID, WAS
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NOT BEING USED IN THE JUSTIFICATION. WHILE THE MIRAGES WERE NOT PERFORMED WELL IN THE 1971 WAR, CHARI SAID THAT THE INDIAN MILITARY ARGUED THAT THE PAKISTANI FLEET WAS NOW IMPROVED AND THAT THE POOR SHOWING BY THE MIRAGES IN 1971 WAS LARGELY DUE TO PROBLEMS WHICH HAD NOW BEEN LARGELY OVERCOME. IN SHORT, CHARI THOUGHT THE MIND OF THE INDIAN DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT WAS MOSTLY MADE UP ON THE DPSA ISSUE.

6. COMMENT: WHILE DISCUSSION OF THE ACQUISITION OF A DPSA HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS AND IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR THIS EMBASSY TO ATTEMPT A PREDICTION AS TO WHEN A DECISION WILL BE MADE, WE AGREE WITH CHARI'S OBSERVATION THAT THE ISSUE SEEMS TO HAVE DEVELOPED A MOMENTUM (AND CERTAINLY A LOBBY) OF ITS OWN. OUR BEST BET AT THIS POINT IS THAT INDIA WILL PURCHASE A DPSA.

7. FROM THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER WE FIND PERSUASIVE EMBASSY ISLAMABAD'S ANALYSIS (REFTEL B) THAT PAKISTAN WILL SEEK A DPSA IF INDIA ACQUIRES ONE WITH THE RESULT THAT THE LEVEL OF ARMS IN THE SUB-CONTINENT WILL ESCALATE TO A HIGHER AND MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE LEVEL.
GOHEEN

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